ABSTRACT

Ramayanbhyudayaharikatha (Samskrutham) of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi

- Prof. A. Ramulu

For Several centuries, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the puranas have proved themselves to be the most effective means of popular instruction in Indian Religion and philosophy. They were recited in temples and congregations on several occasions. The practice of popular exposition of the Epics and the puranas has been handed down to us up to the present day in an unbroken tradition.South India has preserved till today this ancient popular practice of exposition of the Ramayana,the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata for teaching the four goals of life.

Narrating the story of Hari i.eHarikatha awards merit and so Harikatha meant the exposition of the story of Hari. Later, worshippers of other Gods like siva and Devi began on the lines of Harikatha, narrating the stories of their favourite gods and such expositions were also called by the general name Harikatha, meaning the exposition of a God.

This system has been very much alive in Andhra and the greatest name in Harikathas of Andhra was AdibhatlaNaryanadasa who lived during 1864-1945 A.D.

BellamkondaRamarayaKavi's present piece called the **Ramayanbhyudayaharikatha** which is in nine foolscap sizein manuscript commences with a prayer to lord Rama.Here the Harikatha or the exponent is BRK himself. He says that graced byHarigreeva, he commences the Harikatha in order to rescue the mankind from falling into the mouth of the Whale of this world Samsara, in Kaliyuga. On listening to this story the mankind can escape the pangs of birth and death; thus BRK shows the good arising out of listening to the sacred story of the Ramayana.

The sage Narada, the Divine Musician singing the glory of Rama i.e. the Ramayana, chances to descend to the earth, full of adharma and in the garb of an old man , visits some towns in coastal Andhra. During his visit ,he comes across several sinful activities as debauchery, drinking meat eating ,embracing Christianity, neglect of the vedic studies and revolt against established traditions of Religion of the so called

orthodox people. BRK describes the town Rajahmundry in East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh in detail and takes the opportunity to ridicule KandukuriVeeresalingamPantulu who championed the cause of Remarriage of widows. When the Old man (Narada) enquires a citizen of Rajahmundry if there was any suitable girl in that town for marrying his son,the citizen directs him to go to the widow home (maintained by ViresalingamPantulu for the uplift of widows) where a number of good looking ,rich and young widows were available for remarriage. Again the Oldman comes across several sinful activities like debauchery. The sage Narada returns to Heaven and narrates to lord Brahma the evils on the Earth. Then the lord entrusted him with the task of going to Valmiki and asking him to write and propagate the story of Lord Rama which could wash off all evils and sins. When the sage Narada did accordingly, Valmiki wrote the Ramayana, the exposition of which leads the devotees to the attainment of Heaven.Thus the purpose and the origin of the story of the Ramayana are explained.

The uniqueness of this piece isthat ,while generally Harikathas are in the regional language ,this work is in Sanskrit and it is rare to find a Harikatha in Sanskrit.He has made it as interesting as in Telugu. He employs here both verse and prose and the language is sweet and musical. He displays his knowledge of music by nusing several technical words of musicology as sahana etc. He employs some kritis or kirtanas(musical songs with a particular raga,tala etc.).In describing the sinful activities of his times,he exhibits his wit and humor and criticizes the anti-orthodox practices and reforms. His style is easy and unpedantic. He has demonstrated that Harikathas can be narrated in Sanskrit also on modern themes and trends. Probably he wrote this to point out the sinful activities of the people of his times and to show them a remedy to get over the evils.He seems tohave disapproved the social reform work of ViresalingamPantulu and others.